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Representative Ellyn Bogdanoff leads House Republican flip-flop on tobacco surcharge

TALLAHASSEE, FL -- After months of demagoguery about cigarette taxes and in sharp contrast to her political posturing, House Finance & Taxation Council Chair Ellyn Bogdanoff, R-Fort Lauderdale, introduced legislation today to impose a new surcharge on tobacco products.

Only a few weeks ago, Representative Bogdanoff stated that she was staunchly opposed to the very proposal that she offered on the House floor today and said she “will go down kicking and screaming” in opposition.

Representative Bogdanoff’s rhetoric doesn’t match the reality of her actions. Once again, Florida House Republicans are promoting an agenda characterized by partisan attacks and obstructionist tactics.

For perspective, please see *The Orlando Sentinel*, March 13, story about Bogdanoff’s stance on tobacco taxes.

THE ORLANDO SENTINEL, March 13:

Florida House leader Ellyn Bogdanoff to fight higher cigarette tax

By Josh Hafenbrack | Tallahassee Bureau

March 13, 2009

TALLAHASSEE - Rep. [Ellyn Bogdanoff](#), a [Fort Lauderdale](#) Republican in charge of tax issues, has a quick answer to supporters of a proposed cigarette tax increase: No way.

A bid to raise Florida's cigarette tax by up to \$1 a pack goes through Bogdanoff's powerful Finance and Tax Council. Her staunch opposition darkens the chances for the smokes tax, which always was a tough sell in the Republican-controlled Legislature.

"I'm not interested in the cigarette tax," she said in an interview. "This is not the time to increase taxes. You're sending a very, very bad message to say, this is how we're going to" balance the budget.

Advocates view this session as a prime opportunity to raise the state's 34-cents-per-pack cigarette tax, the sixth-lowest in the nation. Desperate for cash to balance the budget, key [Republicans](#) say everything's on the table, including increasing the cigarette tax and repealing sales tax exemptions.

Rep. Jim Waldman, D-Coconut Creek, said House Republicans might be making noise about turning down the cigarette tax, but they won't have a choice. Today, another revenue estimate is due out, and is expected to show a budget deficit of \$5 billion or more.

"They don't have enough money. And they're going to get to the point where there aren't enough programs to cut," said Waldman, whose proposal for a \$1-a-pack increase is awaiting a hearing in Bogdanoff's committee.

"They've boxed themselves into a corner," Waldman said.

But **Bogdanoff** said a cigarette tax won't happen "if I have my way." If the issue comes up in budget negotiations, **Bogdanoff** said she'd have a seat at the table to argue against it.

"I will go down kicking and screaming," she said.

Indeed, the conservative House has long been an obstacle to tax increases, and this year is no different.

"They're still using their no-tax mantra," said American Lung Association lobbyist Brenda Olsen, who for years has been prodding legislators to raise the cigarette tax as a way to cut down smoking rates.